



Film still, *The Baby* (dir. Ted Post, 1973). Courtesy TV Matters.

First of all, the film experience is one of regression. You couldn't speak of "suspension of disbelief" if this weren't true. For what is being suspended is some notion of a critical egotistical "me" which allows for domination by something perceived of as "outside" the self. Freud's concept of the death instinct, the desire to return to the pleasurable, egoless state of prenatal existence in the womb, is important here.<sup>1</sup> Like many religious temples that refer to the body of the "great" Mother, the dark theater where we experience cinema could be considered a womb substitute. But the film event is a shared experience, involving something more complex than a simple autistic abandonment of the ego. Witnessed, even if dimly, by others around us, our experience, we could say, is a socialized, superego-dominated form of regression predicated on an outside object.

Melanie Klein argues that "object relations" exist from the beginning of life. The first, or "primary," object, she argues, is the mother's breast, and other object relations develop from an initial relationship to this object.<sup>2</sup> Psychoanalytic film theory offers many correlations between the